[NET HUNTERS]

575 special *elima* songs by initiated girls and women, to mark any event of special importance to the womenfolk of the camp. The *elima* is an association that serves to bind women of otherwise different backgrounds together. It not only emphasizes their unity as a group opposed to the group of men, but also emphasizes their identification with the hunting band as a whole. It serves as a means of religious expression for the women just as the *molimo* does for the men. It operates separately, but simultaneously, on occasions of common religious significance. Unfortunately, details are lacking in the Putnam material as to the exact occasions on which each of these associations functions.

[081]

[P. 224-B]

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Unlike the *molimo*, however, the *elima* usually calls for the joint participation of men and women both in song and in dance, which in this context are essentially means of religious expression. This joint participation is in no way connected with that aspect of the *elima* that involves the formal deflowering of the young maiden.

The *molimo*, as practiced by the net hunters, both from the Putnam material and from my own field notes, is strikingly different in manifestation from the description given by Schebesta (1952, 278) of the archers' *toré* association. I mention above the fact that the Putnam material places far more weight on the religious than on the social function of the *molimo*. We have also seen that participation in the *nkumbi* does not necessarily entitle the young Mbuti to take part in the *molimo* proceedings. The *molimo* is essentially an association of adult males; an adult male is a hunter, and one does not become a hunter by being circumcised and learning a number of village songs and dances.

765 534 long trumpet, with Madyadya holding the front on his shoulder, pointing it over the river toward the camp. Once again the night 765 was shattered as though there were a whole herd of elephants trumpet- 534 533 ing shrilly all around us. When the echoes died away, the camp 825 across the river had fallen silent. Ausu blew into the trumpet again, and this time it was as if a leopard were growling angrily nearby. [201] One of the youths clapped himself under the armpit, as Pygmies frequently do, and said to himself, "That is its voice, just exactly." He clapped himself again with delight, and gave a little growl of his own.

765 533 156 781 534 Little more than a minute had passed when Amabosu, the great singer, appeared from the shadows below us. He looked at us without saying anything, without smiling or making any greeting. His eyes had the strange look they often took on when he was singing or playing the drums in a dance in the village. They seemed to be seeing something quite different from what was going on in front of [825] them. He went up to Ausu and took the molimo from him and gently filled the forest with strange sounds—the rumblings and growls of buffalos and leopards, the mighty call of the elephant, the plaintive cooing of the dove. Interspersed were snatches of song, transformed by the trumpet into a sound quite unlike the song of men—richer, softer, more distant and unapproachable.

765 534 123 He continued blowing as we moved off, down the slope and to the bank of the river, but when we plunged into the water and waded across, the two trumpets left us and were carried upstream. [533] They growled and bellowed somewhere behind us as we made our 765 562 way along the path to the camp. In the clearing the men were standing up to see us arrive, and the women were hurrying about doing what they had to do before shutting themselves up in their huts. The [858] voice of the molimo had warned them that it was time to retire. The children had all been chased inside. One by one leaf doors were

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expectancy. Every evening, when the women shut themselves up, pretending that they were afraid to see "the animal of the forest"; every evening, when the men gathered around the fire, pretending they thought that the women thought the drainpipes were animals; every evening, when the trumpet drainpipes imitated leopards and elephants and buffalos—every evening, when all this make-believe was going on, I felt that something very real and very great was going on beneath it, something that everyone else took for granted, and about which only I was ignorant.

It was as though the songs which lured the "animal" to the fireside also invoked some other kind of presence. As the evenings wore on toward morning, the songs got more and more serious, and the atmosphere not exactly tense but charged with an emotion powerful enough to send the dancers swirling through the molimo fire as though its flames and red-hot coals held no heat, as though the glowing embers were cold ashes. Yet there was nothing fanatic or frenzied about their action in dancing through the fire. Then there was always that point when the "animal" left the camp and returned to the forest, taking the presence with it. I could feel it departing as the mellow, wistful voice of the molimo got farther and farther away.

The morning rampages carried no such presence with them; they seemed more tangible both in actuality and in purpose. I learned that after these rampages the trumpets were brought back to the Lelo River, just above where the men bathed, and immersed there during the daytime so that the women would not see them. One day there was a terrible storm and the Lelo rose four or five feet, transformed into a torrent. When the rain abated in the late afternoon Madyadya went to look for the trumpets and found that one of them had been washed away. This caused tremendous hilarity, though of course everyone tried to disguise what they were talking about in front of the women. The women, playing the same game, pretended not to

know what was going on. Eventually the trumpet was found some distance downstream, full of sand and gravel and mud.

But that night, in spite of its prosaic experience, it was a mysterious thing again, alive and awe-inspiring and wonderfully beautiful; something that made the eyes of young and old alike light up with pleasure as they heard it sing. And, as always, there was that look in Amabosu's eyes as he worked his magic with the drainpipe. He was no longer Amabosu; he had some other personality totally different, and distant.

One day, when I was beginning to wonder if I would ever find out what it was all about, I was out with Kenge and his half-brother, Maipe. We had left at dawn, as we wanted to go to a distant part of the forest, about five hours' walk if one carried no load, and return by nightfall. About halfway there, far to the north of the Lelo and near the great falls of the Kare River, we stopped for a rest. We were in an *idu*, a small natural clearing used by the forest animals as a salt lick. For some reason we started talking about water and I asked again why the molimo trumpets always drank when they crossed a stream. Maipe, who seldom said much, said, as Ausu had, that they always gave wooden trumpets water to drink because it made them sound better. So, he said, it had become a custom and they still followed it even if the trumpet was metal. I then asked why the trumpets were kept in water and was again given a practical answer—it was the easiest place to hide them. I finally arrived at the question I had been leading up to—what happened to the molimo trumpets at the end of a festival? Did they go back to live in the water?

This struck both Maipe and Kenge as terribly funny. They said certainly not; if the trumpets were kept in the water always they would rot right away and everyone would be spending all their time making new ones instead of hunting. Without any further prompting

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But, most important, he told me, or rather showed me, how the Pygmies believe in the goodness of the forest. "The forest is a father and mother to us," he said, "and like a father or mother it gives us everything we need—food, clothing, shelter, warmth . . . and affection. Normally everything goes well, because the forest is good to its children, but when things go wrong there must be a reason."

I wondered what he would say now, because I knew that the village people, in times of crisis, believe that they have been cursed either by some evil spirit or by a witch or sorcerer. But not the Pygmies; their logic is simpler and their faith stronger, because their world is kinder.

Moke showed me this when he said, "Normally everything goes well in our world. But at night when we are sleeping, sometimes things go wrong, because we are not awake to stop them from going wrong. Army ants invade the camp; leopards may come in and steal a hunting dog or even a child. If we were awake these things would not happen. So when something big goes wrong, like illness or bad hunting or death, it must be because the forest is sleeping and not looking after its children. So what do we do? We wake it up. We wake it up by singing to it, and we do this because we want it to awaken happy. Then everything will be well and good again. So when our world is going well then also we sing to the forest because we want it to share our happiness."

All this I had heard before, but I had not realized quite so clearly that this was what the molimo was all about. It was as though the nightly chorus were an intimate communion between a people and their god, the forest. Moke even talked about this, but when he did so he stopped working on his bow and turned his wrinkled old face to stare at me with his deep, brown, smiling eyes. He told me how all Pygmies have different names for their god, but how they all know that it is really the same one. Just what it is, of course, they don't know, and that is why the name really does not matter very

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much. "How can we know?" he asked. "We can't see him; perhaps only when we die will we know and then we can't tell anyone. So how can we say what he is like or what his name is? But he must be good to give us so many things. He must be of the forest. So when we sing, we sing to the forest."

The complete faith of the Pygmies in the goodness of their forest world is perhaps best of all expressed in one of their great molimo songs, one of the songs that is sung fully only when someone has died. At no time do their songs ask for this or that to be done, for the hunt to be made better or for someone's illness to be cured; it is not necessary. All that is needful is to awaken the forest, and everything will come right. But suppose it does not, suppose that someone dies, then what? Then the men sit around their evening fire, as I had been doing with them for the past month, and they sing songs of devotion, songs of praise, to wake up the forest and rejoice it, to make it happy again. Of the disaster that has befallen them they sing, in this one great song, "There is darkness all around us; but if darkness *is*, and the darkness is of the forest, then the darkness must be good."

As Moke looked at me and spoke I wondered if this was how he had once explained things to his own son. Now I began to understand what happened at night when fifteen feet of drainpipe was carried into the camp and someone blew or sang into it; and I began to understand what the "presence" was—it was surely the presence of the Forest itself, in all its beauty and goodness.

Moke turned back to his bow and began whittling again.

"You will soon see things of which you have never heard, and which you have never seen. Then you will understand things that I can never tell you. But you must stay awake—you may see them only once."

He started humming to himself, and I left.

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765 lage, and I heard leaves being ripped off roofs and the dried mud
534 beaten from walls.

765 There was a subtle change of atmosphere, and a tremendous air
533 of expectancy. By their insistent singing the older men seemed to
• 781 be trying to avert some disaster, as did the youths by their danc-
[513] ing. Moke allowed nobody to sleep or rest except for a very brief spell when he kept half a dozen men singing while the others dozed as best they could around the fire. Then he woke us up and goaded us all into singing harder than ever. The molimo had left and was evidently playing havoc in the Negro village. But as we sang it came sweeping back into the camp from behind Ekianga's house.
765 The two fire-dancers in front sent showers of sparks up into the air
781 and onto the ground. The molimo made straight for the central fire.
535 It knocked us aside—even old Tungana—and slowly and deliber-
534 ately it trampled through the fire, scattering it to all sides.
372

The men who had been sitting were on their feet at once, and hurriedly threw the scattered logs back into the center and joined the dancers in bringing life back to the fire. But the molimo was insistent, and the next time all the men joined with it. Reluctantly at first, then sharing the inevitability of the occasion they too danced and stamped among the flaming logs until there was nothing left but glowing coals. As the pace of the dance increased, the embers were scattered wider and wider, until the whole of the village seemed to be carpeted with winking red eyes. The molimo was once again blowing martial blasts, and the men accompanied it with a deep, rhythmic chant. All except a few of the elders followed it on its last tour of the camp, slow and majestic, tramping out the fire of life until there was only one glowing ember left. I saw Moke sadly sit down on the ground beside it, pick it up in his hands and fondle it.
[276] He took a cigarette butt from behind his ear and lighted it with the coal. He put the coal carefully back on the ground, stood up and stepped on it until it too was extinguished. Then he turned his back on us all and disappeared into his hut.